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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: FORMOSA GOVERNOR CONCERNED ABOUT BORDER WITH PARAGUAY

Ref: Buenos Aires 1055

11. (SBU) Summary: Peronist Gildo Insfran, Governor of Argentina's northeastern province of Formosa, discussed with Ambassador Wayne on November 20 his views regarding economic development, renewable energy, the challenges of cross-border security, and the status of Formosa's indigenous population. He was particularly concerned about increased drug trafficking across Formosa's border with Paraguay. The Governor was accompanied by his economic adviser and private secretary, Daniel Giuliani, and by the province's Minister of Public Works & Services, Jorge Ibanez. End Summary

Economy and Alternative Energy

12. (SBU) The Governor opined that although Formosa is "doing well," he is concerned about how an economic crisis in the largest economy in the world might affect a developing country like Argentina and his province, in particular. He relayed that Formosa's economy is based on cattle-ranching, cotton cultivation and other agriculture, but noted that they are also focused on producing biofuels, such as ethanol and bio-diesel. The Governor relayed that in 1999, the province launched the "petroleum plus" project, which focuses on petroleum exploration, exploitation, and refining. The Governor touted the merits of bio-ethanol, remarking that the sugar cane needed for ethanol thrives in the province's moist soil. The Ambassador said Argentina and the U.S. will be working closely together in an alternative energy working group in the wake of the agreement signed in July 2008 during A/S Shannon's bilateral consultation visit (reftel).

Challenges of Cross-Border Security

13. (SBU) The Governor cited security concerns, particularly drug trafficking, along the long, porous border with Paraguay, and noted the province was working with officials in Paraguay to address the problems. He suggested that drug trafficking had increased in Argentina but said he did not have actual statistics showing this. He added that the province had imported a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle to assist with aerial patrols similar to the U.S. border patrols along the Mexico border, highlighting that it is the only program of its kind in South America. The Ambassador encouraged the Governor's counter drug personnel to reach out to Embassy's DEA section.

On Formosa's Indigenous

14. (SBU) The Governor praised his province's treatment of its indigenous population, noting that with only 600 thousand inhabitants province-wide, there is plenty of land for all. He asserted that the indigenous do not protest over land because they have it, remarking that in the district of Ramon Lista, 95 percent of the population is aboriginal. He added that Formosa has an aboriginal law, offers bilingual education from primary through high school, and has an institute created to protect the rights of the province's three indigenous groups. He proudly noted that the province has one indigenous national deputy.

Biographic Information

¶5. (SBU) A steady supporter of Nestor and Cristina Kirchner's administrations, Insfran was re-elected in 2007 as Formosa Governor for his third consecutive term. He received 75% of the vote, far above his closest competitor, the Radical candidate Gabriel Hernandez who obtained 17% of the vote. Insfran was first elected Governor in 1995 and ran for reelection in 1999 due to an amendment of the provincial constitution. A subsequent amendment of the constitution did away with term limits, thus allowing Insfran to run and win the gubernatorial seat for the third consecutive time. Previously, Insfran had served two terms as Vice-Governor of Formosa, beginning in 1987. Prior to that, he had served as provincial legislator for the 1983-1987 term.

¶6. (SBU) A veterinarian by training, Insfrn was born in Laguna Blanca, Formosa, in 1951. He is divorced from Teresa Baldus, with whom he had two daughters and one son. Their 17 year-old son committed suicide in 2003.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The Governor was warm and friendly with U.S. officials and expressed his support for increased collaboration between his province and the U.S. Embassy.

WAYNE